

FACT SHEET: SB 203

AUTHOR: SENATOR FRAN PAVLEY

VENTURA COUNTY TRANSPORTATION – FUNDING FLEXIBILITY FOR SMALL CITIES

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THE PROBLEM

In 2009, SB 716 (Wolk), enacted major reforms to the Transportation Development Act, among them a provision that allowed cities in urban counties with populations under 100,000 to use their Transportation Development Act funds for either transit or local streets and roads, provided their use conformed to the findings of the unmet needs test.

At the time of the Wolk legislation, Ventura County was granted a temporary exemption to the law in an effort to provide the County additional time to address current transportation challenges and develop its Countywide Transit Plan. Now that the Ventura County's transportation plan is being finalized, SB 203 would give Ventura County the same local funding flexibility afforded other small cities in the state.

BACKGROUND

The Legislature enacted the Transportation Development Act (SB 325) in 1971 which authorized the boards of supervisors in each county to impose a ¼-percent local sales tax for transportation purposes. All counties imposed that tax in 1972, because if they had not, the state, under California's uniform tax law, would have collected the one-percent of local sales tax destined for the general funds of cities and counties.

The focus of the law was to support public transportation services, but recognized that rural areas have a different mix of transportation needs. As enacted, the TDA required revenues from the tax to be used for public transit purposes in counties with a population greater than 500,000 as of the 1970 census.

At that time, nine counties in California exceeded 500,000 persons in population: Alameda, Contra Costa, Los Angeles, Sacramento, San Bernardino, San Francisco, San Mateo and Santa Clara. Counties with a population under 500,000 as of 1970, such as Ventura, were free to use the TDA revenues for transit and for local streets and roads.

SB 716 (2009)

In 2009, SB 716 (Wolk) enacted a series of reforms to the Transportation Development Act, the most significant being that all counties with populations over 500,000 as of the 2010 federal decennial census, would generally have to allocate all TDA revenues to public transit services by 2014. Cities within these counties with populations of 100,000 or less would be allowed to use their monies for either transit or streets and roads if they conformed to the unmet needs test.

Ventura County was exempted from the legislation and given additional time to develop their transit plan because of variety of complexities unique to the County. Some of the key challenges have included:

- Inability of Ventura County, despite several attempts, to approve a sales tax increase to help fund rural or small city connecting services, as well as road maintenance.
- Elimination of redevelopment agencies, creating further funding challenges for the county.
- Geographical diversity including expansive farming areas, mountains and large open space demands, making it difficult to maintain fare box levels required for TDA funding.

- Differences between the east and west cities of Ventura County, such as size, ridership demographics and commuter trends which have made it difficult to agree on an integrated transit system.

While a Countywide Transit plan was approved by the Ventura County Transportation Commission in April 2012, additional modifications have been undertaken to develop a program to further improve the quality and quantity of transit in Ventura County.

In March 2013, the Ventura County Transportation Commission voted to approve additional refinements to the VCTC Countywide Transit Plan which included the following:

- The continuation of VCTC 's role as the VISTA Intercity/Intercounty regional transit service provider using a variety of funding sources for continuation.
- Support for community/subregional transit services in three areas: Gold Coast Transit area, East County area and Heritage Valley area.
- Continuation of efforts to obtain equitable treatment for the use of TDA funds with other parts of the state.
- Comprehensive review and re-evaluation of the TDA Unmet Transit Needs process.

The Solution

- This bill is one part of Ventura County Transportation Commission's efforts to provide a fair and balanced transit plan for the county.
- SB 203 permits cities under 100,000 in Ventura County to have the same flexibility to meet transit or local road needs as other small cities in the state and thus ensures that all cities under 100,000 population are treated equitably within the law.
- Deletes references in current law related to the development of the current Ventura County

Tran Plan, and consequently, allows cities in Ventura County with smaller populations to use Transportation Development Act funds for either transit or local streets provided the use conforms to the findings of the unmet needs test.

- Require the Ventura County Transportation Commission to annually report on its Internet Web site the county's efforts to address transit service for the next five years. The report shall include a description of transit route changes, changes to services levels on transit routes and ridership numbers for all transit routes operating within the county. The report shall also include annual budget numbers for transit services provided by the commission, Gold Coast Transit, other multiagency operators and individual municipal operators.
- Currently, 6 out of the 10 cities in Ventura County have populations under 100,000. These include: Moorpark, Ojai, Santa Paula, Port Hueneme, Fillmore and Camarillo.

SPONSOR: Ventura County Transportation Commission